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CURSORY REMARKS

UPON THE ARRANGEMENT

OF

THE PLAYS OF SHAKESPEAR.

OCCASIONED BY READING

MR. MALONE'S ESSAY ON THE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER
OF THOSE CELEBRATED PIECES.

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CURSORY REMARKS

ON THE ASSASSINAT

THE LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

BY JAMES K. BAKER

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

IN THE DEPARTMENT OF



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TO
MR. ALDERMAN BOYDELL,
AND HIS NUMEROUS SUBSCRIBERS,
THE FOLLOWING REMARKS,
TENDING TO SHEW THE NECESSITY OF AN
IMPROVEMENT,
IN WHICH THEY ARE MOST ESSENTIALLY
CONCERNED,
ARE, WITH ALL DUE RESPECT
AND SUBMISSION,
PARTICULARLY ADDRESSSED.

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CURSORY REMARKS, &c.

FROM the days in which I first became a reader of the plays of Shakespear, I have always been offended at the improper manner in which those pieces are arranged. As they now stand in *every* edition, though the method of arrangement is not the same in *all*, the reader is continually surpris'd by a sudden transition from a production of little merit to one of great excellence, or disgusted by a change as instantaneous, from a performance in every respect admirable to one altogether as rude and contemptible. This, therefore, we may with the greatest safety affirm, was not the order in which these plays were originally written by their Author.

When Mr. Malone's edition was announced to the public, I hoped that this evil would have been remedied; but I am

disappointed. For, though he has appeared with an ingenious essay on the chronology of Shakespear's plays, he has varied but little from his predecessors in his disposition of them. He has not even followed his own chronological index, but has given us the whole in a series very little different from the first published by Heming and Condell *. In this series (the series of Mr. Malone) it is my intention in the following remarks to glance slightly upon each play in its turn, placing before me his chronological essay, and interspersing such observations as the piece in hand may suggest, whether connected with my main design or not.

THE TEMPEST.

I cannot agree with Mr. Malone that the Tempest exhibits strong internal marks of having been a late production of Shakespear. It may certainly be ascribed to a period as

* The author here speaks of Mr. Malone's first edition of Shakespear, which is to be followed by another, in which he purposes to arrange the pieces in the order in which he supposes them to have been written.

early

early as the year 1600, in which Dr. Farmer has observed, that the first account of the Bermuda Islands (mentioned in this play) was published. I should not much hesitate to give it even an earlier date. King John and the Merchant of Venice, which are both written in a very superior stile, are mentioned by Meres in 1598. I cannot think that the Tempest was written *after* those pieces, for it contains many incontestable proofs of having proceeded from the pen of a writer who was not greatly skilled in the art of making blank verse. Some lines are so unmusical, harsh, and laboured, that it is almost impossible to make them run in any metre at all. The greater part of the Masque introduced in Act IV. is written with much stiffness, and will always be read with difficulty. Nor is there in the Masque itself any thing ingenious. Add to this, that there are not many plays in which Shakespear is more frequently guilty of *dividing his verb** at the end of a

* For instance,

Bravely this figure of the harpy *hast thou*

Perform'd—

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line;

line; a fault never to be found in an experienced poet.

It is not, however, my intention to argue, that the first place, in which the *Tempest* has always stood, is a station to which it is entitled. There are many other plays of *Shakespear* which certainly were written before it.

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

Mr. Malone's reasons for affixing this piece to the year 1595, are highly judicious and sensible. I cannot, however, agree with him and Sir William Blackstone, that it bears strong internal marks of having been an early composition. Whatever its defects may be, it is certainly a play which, when compared with many other of *Shakespear's* performances, will appear to have proceeded from a writer who was considerably improved by practice. I cannot for a moment hesitate to declare it a later composition than many which in
Mr.

Mr. Malone's chronological catalogue are placed after it. It was certainly written after the Winter's Tale, Cymbeline, Antony and Cleopatra, Timon of Athens, Coriolanus, and the Tempest. For no poet could have written these latter pieces, which abound in defects of stile and rhythm, after a piece so generally good in both as The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Some have imagined that Shakespear was not the author of this piece. But if we reject it, there will be reason to question many other of the plays, which were evidently written by the hand which produced this. Mr. Malone has with great justice observed, that the comic parts of it are of the same colour as the comic parts of Love's Labour Lost, The Comedy of Errors, and the Midsummer Night's Dream. He might have added to the list, Twelfth Night, All's well that ends well, and Troilus and Cressida. For all these pieces, when compared together, bear evident marks of relationship, and if *one* of them belongs to Shakespear, they are *all* his. On
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the contrary, if *one* of them can be proved to be not his, the authenticity of *the whole* will be dubious. It seems that Shakespear, at a certain period of his life, became sensible of his want of skill in the selection and modification of his language and the construction of his lines; and that from that time he suffered his attention to be in a great measure diverted, from the artful management of his fable and the nice discrimination of his characters, to improve himself in his diction and his numbers. At that period I suppose most or all of these plays to have been written.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

If this piece cannot with sufficient propriety be inserted among the historical plays, it should be placed immediately after them. There can be no good reason assigned for its remaining here.

MEASURE

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

It seems highly probable, from the ingenious observations which Mr. Malone has made upon the chronology of this piece, that it was produced in the first year of King James; unless we suppose the allusions which relate to the events of that year, to have been inserted after the play had been some time written. The piece in itself does not afford many marks of being a late composition. Its metre is not without many improper terminations. And, though there are to be found in it passages in which the sentiment is elevated to an uncommon degree of excellence, Dr. Johnson's remark is undoubtedly just, that the grave scenes have in general more labour than elegance. I must also agree with him that Shakespear was guilty of a great oversight, in not making Isabel express either gratitude, wonder, or joy, at the sight of her brother when restored to her. But this is an error of the same complexion with
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the behaviour of Claudio upon the sight of Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing*; and perhaps is no very feeble argument, that those two pieces were composed about the same time. At all events, I cannot believe *Measure for Measure* to have been written later than *Much Ado about Nothing*. For though the moral is excellent, and the concluding scene, in all other instances but the silence of Isabel, is conducted with great address, there is much coarseness and indelicacy spread over the whole piece.

COMEDY OF ERRORS.

Mr. Malone is certainly right in the date which he has given to this play. It must have been written between the years 1589 and 1594. It appears also, from the occasional use of the doggerel measure, to have been written about the same time, and by the same author, as *Love's Labour Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. I cannot, however, think it one of Shakespear's early productions. It ranks indeed very properly

properly with the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the two plays already mentioned; but is, notwithstanding, a piece very correctly written, and therefore could not have been produced so early as many. I have sometimes been led to imagine, that it was a piece too correct to have been written by Shakespear at this time. I have been upon the eve of ascribing it to Drayton in general, especially from the name of Dowdabel, which is introduced in it; and have thought that Shakespear was probably only the author of particular passages, such as the description of Pinch, the speeches of Ægeon which follow it, and one or two more which do not well agree with the rest of the play. But if Drayton had a hand in this piece, he must be admitted as an assistant in others, and where his claims would end I know not,

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

This play may very properly be associated with the two pieces which precede
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and the two which follow it, and was perhaps one of the earliest of them. For though it is a performance which is, in general, correct in its metre, and has much nature, wit, and good-sense, in it; yet towards the conclusion it betrays a great want of judgment, or great haste and carelessness. The conversation and passion of the two brothers at the commencement of Act V. is highly natural. The distress of Don Pedro and Claudio upon hearing how grossly they were deceived, is forcibly expressed. But there is something very unnatural in the proposal made by Leonato, that Claudio should marry his niece, when he had so materially injured his daughter; and in Claudio's giving so freely his consent to be united to a lady whom he supposed he had never seen. There is again great want of contrition in the scene in which Claudio hangs up his epitaph to the memory of Hero; and a notorious impropriety in his causing a hymn to be sung to the *Goddeſs of the Night* from the aisles of a church. Again, when the slandered Hero (supposed

to

to be dead) is introduced a second time to her repentant lover, we look in vain for emotion on either side, and wonder how Shakespear could overlook so fair an opportunity of being highly pathetic and interesting.

LOVE'S LABOUR LOST.

Mr. Malone thinks that Love's Labour Lost bears strong marks of having been one of Shakespear's earliest essays. It is indeed far from being one of his happiest, and abounds in passages so dull and tiresome, that I have often been tempted, while perusing it, to declare it the production of some other hand. I have, however, always recovered my opinion before the conclusion of the piece, that it really was Shakespear's. I imagine it to be so, from some few beautiful passages which are worthy of that poet, and from considering that, if Shakespear's pen be not acknowledged here, it must

must not be admitted in other pieces, which were unquestionably written by the author of this play, and which are manifestly the productions of Shakespear.

But that it was a very early production, I do not believe. The author of it is not without considerable skill in versification, there being no play of Shakespear's, excepting Twelfth Night, which has so few exceptionable lines, notwithstanding it is a performance of great length. The date which Mr. Malone has assigned to it, appears to be right. We may nevertheless pronounce, that many of the plays were certainly written before it.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

“ Wild and fantastical as this play is,” says Dr. Johnson, “ all the parts, in their various modes, are well written.” It ranks indeed among the most correct of Shakespear's performances, having but few lame or faulty lines. There are in it many passages

pages which are beautifully descriptive, and its observations, whether relative to nature or books, are accurate and judicious. All its fictions are elegantly introduced, and gracefully supported by nature. This proves it to have been the production of a judgment considerably matured. Mr. Malone thinks it was one of our author's earliest performances, and the date which he has assigned to it seems to be very reasonable. But there were undoubtedly many plays written before it. It was, however, certainly produced during the reign of Elizabeth, and I should imagine not long before the close of it. I would willingly believe that the death of Spenser was alluded to when the author speaks of *learning late deceased in beggary*, this humane little tribute to the memory of a brother poet being so much of a colour with the compliment before paid to the unhappy Mary Queen of Scots.

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MERCHANT

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

This play Mr. Malone, upon the authority of Meres, has attributed to the year 1598. I would willingly give it a later date, could it be demanded with propriety, having sometimes imagined that the last speech which Portia makes to Bassanio before he peruses the caskets, contains an allusion which had never presented itself to the mind of the author unless he had been present at a coronation. Wherever we place it, the piece was undoubtedly an effort of Shakespear's muse in her best days. It is all nature. The sentiment is correct, and the language polished. The story, it is true, is sometimes romantic and incredible; and there are some lines in it which are unmusical and ill-constructed. But when we have substracted from its merit for every defect, it will still keep its place as one of the most ingenious and highly finished of all our author's performances.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

The first part of this piece has much merit. The latter part is less pleasing. It seems by the name, and the epilogue, that Shakespear himself did not quite approve of the performance when brought to a conclusion. The language, however, except in an instance or two, is pure and correct; and there is so much ease in the versification in general, and so much weight in the morality, that it must be esteemed one of his latest and best plays. He seems to have affected in it that *quiet and sweet stile* of which he speaks at the beginning of Act II.

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW.

I think, with Mr. Malone, that, from an attentive consideration of the stile and manner of this piece, it will appear to have

been written about the same time as the comedy of Errors, Love's Labour Lost, and The Two Gentlemen of Verona. I cannot, however, agree with him that it was one of Shakespear's very early productions. I could point out *twenty* of his plays which contain, individually, a greater number of lines improperly constructed. It must, however, be confessed, that the metre of this piece is often censurable, and therefore it might probably be the first written of those pieces with which it is associated.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

The metre of this play has not many imperfections. The construction of the whole piece bears a strong resemblance to Twelfth Night : it was therefore probably written about the same time. It has not however sufficient merit to make me think it a late production of Shakespear's. Its local beauties are few, its incident is often uninteresting, and its catastrophe is highly

highly disgusting. Perhaps the date which Mr. Malone has assigned to it, is not far remote from the true one.

TWELFTH NIGHT.

Of this piece Dr. Johnson has with great justice observed, "that some of the lighter scenes are exquisitely humorous, and the graver part is always elegant and easy." It is indeed, in its metre, one of the most correct performances of Shakespear. I have not found in it a dozen lines which are hastily and improperly constructed. This will help very much to confirm Mr. Malone's conjecture, that it is entitled to a late date. I do not, however, imagine that it was his last effort, unless we are to suppose that it was written in a state of retirement, without much exertion. For though it has many very beautiful passages, yet does it often betray a want of judgment. Its fable is protracted by fooleries, of which we have more than enough, and its cata-

trophe cut short where it was most interesting.

THE WINTER'S TALE.

The Winter's Tale, though it has many admirable strokes of nature and good sense, and is a piece which no man can peruse without being greatly delighted, was undoubtedly one of Shakespear's earliest compositions. The faults of its metre and its language are so numerous, that it must be ranked with Antony and Cleopatra, Henry VIII. Coriolanus, and Cymbeline, which five pieces I cannot help being strongly of opinion were the earliest efforts of our poet's muse. In what order they were written I am not able to determine; but of this I am certain, that they have all, taken individually, twice as many lines unskilfully measured as are to be found in any other single play of Shakespear. Mr. Malone has many good arguments to support a later date, among which I shall only mention that

that borrowed from Sir William Blackstone, who thinks that the following passage could not have been written till after the death of Queen Elizabeth.

If I could find example
Of thousands that had struck anointed kings
And flourish'd after, I'd not do it; but since
Nor brass, nor stone, nor parchment bears not one,
Let villainy itself forswear it.

To the son of Mary Queen of Scots these lines would indeed have been more agreeable than to Elizabeth; and they might have been inserted after the accession of James, like the compliment at the end of Henry VIII. We have repeated instances that Shakespear could accommodate his performances to the reigning times. The compliment he has paid to the Queen in the fable of the play, is very evident, and affords a strong proof that it was written during her life-time. For it is not likely that he would endeavour to exculpate Anne Bullen in the reign of James.

MACBETH.

This, in the main, is a noble performance, though Dr. Johnson has very properly observed that it has no nice discriminations of character. "Every intelligent reader" (to use the words of Mr. Malone) "must be struck with the consummate art which Shakespear has displayed in the preparation for the murder of Duncan, and during the commission of that dreadful act." Every one, I will add, must admire the hypocrisy of Macbeth after the murder, and the lively compunctions of his conscience. Every one must be sensible of the singular propriety of the first words with which he addresses the murderer who comes to him at the banquet; and of the whole distress in which his lady is involved upon observing the agitation of her husband's mind during the feast, and again when she appears in her sleep. Nor can any man be blind to the beauty of the images,

images, which the poet has, in several instances, copied immediately from nature; and particularly when Duncan first arrives at the castle of Macbeth.

Dun. This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

Ban. This guest of summer,
The temple haunting martlet, does approve
By his lov'd mansionry, that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here: no jutting frieze,
Buttress, nor coigne of vantage, but this bird
Hath made pendent bed and procreant cradle.
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observ'd
The air is delicate.

Great commendation is also due to this piece for the admirable moral which it conveys, upon which the poet seems to have been chiefly intent, viz.

It will have blood, they say blood will have blood.

But while we applaud the great excellence of the Poet in this play, and conclude it to be one of his latest performances, from the few lines which are to be found in it improperly constructed, let us not
give

give it a station to which it has no title. Mr. Malone, in placing it immediately before Julius Cæsar, has not placed it amiss, though it could not have been composed immediately after Cymbeline. Faults indeed it has, among which I will only mention the unnatural scene between Lady Macduff and her son. But, notwithstanding all its faults, Dr. Farmer is certainly right in pronouncing it to be one of Shakespear's latest productions. The language, indeed, is not so pure and classical, nor the sentiment, in general, so elevated, as in King Lear, Julius Cæsar, Hamlet, and the Merchant of Venice; but, excepting these, perhaps no play of Shakespear was written later than Macbeth.

The date which Mr. Malone has given to this piece, viz. 1606, is most probably right. It appears evidently to have been written after the accession of James, from the allusion in Act IV. Scene I. to the union of the three kingdoms under one sovereign, and from the subsequent allusion to the cure of the King's evil by the royal touch,

touch. Dr. Warburton has also very sagaciously observed, that the character of Banquo seems to have been softened in compliment to King James, who was said to be descended from him.

KING JOHN,
AND THE REST OF THE HISTORICAL PLAYS.

The historical plays of Shakespear should be always read in the order in which they have always stood, that is, according to the chain of that history of which they are composed. It appears to have been the design of Shakespear to connect them together, and he often brings before us in one piece characters which have been already introduced to us in another. I do not, therefore, wish to see the present arrangement of them disturbed. It is the most convenient to the reader, though not agreeable to the chronology of the several pieces, the last of which I suspect in many
of

of its scenes to have been the first written. But let me speak of them in their order.

King John is a play in the two first acts of which there are many scenes written in a strain of uncommon majesty, well sustained. The interview between John and Hubert in Act III. in which the death of Arthur is determined, that part of Act IV. which follows the second coronation of the King, and almost the whole of Act V. are finely conceived and well executed. This, together with the general correctness of the language, induces me to believe that it was a late composition.

Richard II. affords a true picture of nature, in the first transports of the King's despair, in the commencement of Act IV. and in those high-wrought scenes between York, his Duchess, and their son. But the passion of York is afterwards too much strained, and becomes brutal and unnatural. Richard's soliloquy in prison is dull and tiresome, and betrays no art. Add to this, that the measure of many lines, especially towards the beginning of the play, is unskilfully

skilfully produced; and I think it will appear that this was no very late production: It was, I imagine, written before King John, in the dawn and early morning of that excellent judgment which the Poet afterwards possessed.

Henry IV. Part I. is a fine play, and abounds with diversity of character. It has however many lines which betray a want of skill in the composer. We may remark also, that it is not likely that a man who runs behind the arras for fear, will fall asleep there. The effect of terror is always vigilance. This, therefore, and the two foolish scenes, one between the Prince and the Drawer, the other between the disaffected Lords and their Wives, make me imagine that this was not a later production than either of the two plays last mentioned.

Henry IV. Part II. seems to have received a date from Mr. Malone which is highly probable. It undoubtedly has internal marks of being a later composition than the preceding play, though, notwithstanding

standing the excellence of some of its scenes, it must be acknowledged to be inferior to that piece in its general effect. It sometimes wants incident, a rare fault in Shakespear. The speakers are tedious, and the play itself is too long. Doll Tear-sheet might well be excused to shorten it. It is nevertheless deserving of its share of the great encomiums which Dr. Johnson has bestowed upon it and its companion.

Henry V. has a date which, as Mr. Malone observes, is easily ascertained by the passage relative to the Earl of Essex's expedition into Ireland, which took place in 1599. Mr. Pope thought it one of our Poet's latest compositions. It certainly was not one of his earliest. The first act of the play is excellent, and there are passages of great merit in other parts of it. Nevertheless, the story is barren of incident, and there is so little of genius or nature to support it, where spun out into foolish scenes and long speeches, that the end is ardently wished for long before it arrives.

Henry VI. Part I. In a note annexed to the

ne first scene of this play, Mr. Malone contends, that there are no *Shakespearian passages* to be found in it, and therefore pronounces himself to be decisively of opinion that it was not written by Shakespear. In proof of his assertion, he requests the reader to attend particularly to the versification of the piece, and observes that almost every line has a pause at the end. This he thinks so very different from the stile of Shakespear's undoubted plays, and so exactly correspondent to the method of the other poets of our author's time, that he deems it an argument which is alone sufficient to decide the question. To many readers it may be, but there is one who must beg leave still to dissent. As to the piece itself, I have not the smallest doubt of its being genuine Shakespear till towards the close of Act IV. Here the poet perhaps borrowed from the lines of some inferior brother, or, as Johnson suspected, from some other performance of his own, which he was unwilling to dismiss with the consciousness of having laboured in vain. Or
perhaps

perhaps he might have been seized by that phrensy of impatience commonly attendant upon genius, when it starts a new theme, and is weary of the subject it has been long pursuing: He might suddenly (as he has evidently done at other times) have disagreed with his work, and have hurried it to a conclusion. The last scenes of the play are undoubtedly very inferior to the first, and render it difficult to determine when it was composed.

The pause at the end of the line I do not think more frequent in this play than in some other pieces of Shakespear. Plays might be pointed out in which it is even more common, especially the comedy of Errors; the Two Gentlemen of Verona; and Love's Labour Lost. This, therefore, is no argument to prove the first part of Henry VI. spurious.

Mr. Malone again thinks it to be the work of some other hand, from the numerous classical allusions to be found in it. I have not discovered any which would not suffer me to believe, that they might have

have been picked up by Shakespear in his ordinary course of reading. Indeed, were classical allusions suffered to bias my opinion respecting the authenticity of this play, I should much rather doubt that the second part of Henry VI. was written by some other bard. I should also question his right to be deemed the author of *The Taming of the Shrew*, from the learning to be found at the commencement of its first and third acts.

Mr. Theobald, with much greater probability, allows that there are master strokes in *all* the three parts of Henry VI. which incontestably betray the workmanship of Shakespear. He is only doubtful that they were not *entirely* of his writing. He adds, however, that, unless they were written by him very early, he imagines they must have been brought to him as a director of the stage, and thus have received some finishing beauties at his hand. Here I can scarce agree with him. The complexion of the piece before us, throughout the three first acts, and the greatest part
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of the fourth, is sufficiently uniform and agreeable to the hue of Shakespear's composition in general, to make me deem it the work of him only. Nor can I agree with Mr. Theobald, that the diction of this part of the play is in any respect more obsolete, or the numbers more mean and prosaical, than in his other compositions. There are, it is true, many lines which have a strange hitch in their gait, but this the accurate observer will generally perceive to have proceeded rather from negligence in transcribers and compositors than want of skill in the writer.

That Shakespear wrote the play I think may be also fairly concluded from the epilogue to Henry V.

Henry VI. Part II. and III. Of these two pieces the first has many passages of uncommon excellence, and may, for its general effect, be deemed a fine play from beginning to end. Some of the speeches towards the close of it are particularly striking. The humour of Cade, in many instances, reminds us of Falstaff. The metre, however, in many

places is extremely defective. It is with difficulty many of the lines can be made to amble by any means. This argues want of skill and practice in the writer, though it does not convince me that these were the first efforts of Shakespear's pen.

Of Richard III. I have little more to say than that it is often tedious, and often improbable, and could not be a very late composition. There are, however, some admirable scenes in it, among which let not the conclusion of Scene I. of Act II. be overlooked; it would afford an excellent subject for the painter. The reader who keeps in his eye the characters present, and the state of mind in which they are severally supposed to be, may conceive a striking variety of attitude and countenance at the moment in which Buckingham exclaims,

Look I so pale, Lord Dorset, as the rest?

Henry VIII. This play was evidently first written when the author was not much practised in his art. From the conclusion

it appears to have been originally finished during the reign of Elizabeth, and to have been afterwards new modelled upon the accession of James. The play itself has marks of awkwardness and want of skill in some places, and in others has great excellence. From the beginning of Act I. to the Cardinal's entertainment, is evidently old and faulty. Then follows more improved composition till we are introduced to Anne Bullen and the old lady in Act II. The remainder of that act is of the inferior sort. The first scene of Act III. is of the best again. From thence till the King exit frowning upon Wolsey, is of an earlier date. In the soliloquy which follows the master of his art again shines forth, and continues to delight us to the end of Act IV. From the beginning of Act V. to the council-chamber scene, is again the work of a young writer. In all the remaining scenes of that act the accomplished poet again appears, with little or no interruption. The play being thus composed

composed of some old and some new scenes, many of the characters betray inconsistency, and particularly the King.

Dr. Johnson has said of this piece, that the genius of Shakespear comes in and goes out with Catharine. But this is surely confining its merit within too small a compass. The scene which comprises the Cardinal's entertainment, and concludes Act I. has in it many marks of ingenuity and observation. The farewell scene of Buckingham cannot be read without emotion, and without praise to the writer. There is also great applause due to the two soliloquies of Wolsey, to the smartness of his replies when beset by the courtiers at his downfall, and to the truly pathetic lesson which he gives to his servant Cromwell. There is again considerable merit, and a striking display of character, in the transactions of the council-chamber in Act V. The hypocrisy and duplicity of Gardiner, and the surly overbearing disposition of the King, are in particular well preserved.

CORIOLANUS.

I cannot agree with Mr. Malone in ranking Timon of Athens, Antony and Cleopatra, and Coriolanus, among the later productions of our author. Of Antony and Cleopatra I have already declared it to be my opinion that it was a very early performance, and I make no doubt but that Coriolanus was written soon after it. For though Dr. Johnson has with great truth observed, that the latter is a very amusing play, and embellished with great diversity of character, yet is it accompanied with a multitude of metrical faults, almost equal in number to those of Antony and Cleopatra. The lines are always those of a young poet who is scarce a master of numbers, and are often made up in a manner which to a musical ear is ridiculous and disgusting. It was probably written a short time before Timon of Athens, since both these pieces abound in faults of the same complexion.

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There is in both an unskilful and sometimes a laughable confusion of British with Roman and Athenian customs, many anachronisms, many broken and ill managed lines, and a dissolute mixture of verse and prose. Add to this that the proper names in *Coriolanus* are often introduced in a manner truly awkward and bungling. It is nevertheless a performance of considerable merit. It has passages of true sublimity and poetical excellence; and here and there surprises us with a few of those delicate touches of nature, by which the author renders himself so irresistible in his appeal to the heart. *Timon of Athens* takes place of it only as being a piece more correct in its metre, and abounding more in observations drawn from nature.

JULIUS CÆSAR.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

Mr. Malone thinks that an attentive review of these two plays will lead us to

conclude that the former was first written. To this opinion I can by no means give assent upon the proofs which he produces, and I think there is in the pieces themselves abundant evidence to confute it. For of all Shakespear's plays, that which most abounds with faulty lines, is Antony and Cleopatra. It is true that the number of these may be somewhat augmented beyond due proportion by its length, for it appears to be the longest of all Shakespear's productions. The faulty lines in Julius Cæsar, when compared with those of this play, stand only in the small ratio of *one* to *three*. Add to this, that Antony and Cleopatra is, in almost every scene, dull and tedious. There is action enough, but it is not made interesting by any nice discrimination or elevation of character, nor by any artful display of nature. The dialogue is always flat and often foolish, abounding with passages which provoke a smile by their absurdity, when the action is solemn and important. It must be acknowledged that there is here and there a ray of poetry, and
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what work of Shakespear's have we seen without one? But here it disappears almost as soon as observed, and there perhaps never fell from the pen of our immortal bard a piece written with less spirit and less knowledge of his art.

Julius Cæsar, on the contrary, is an excellent performance, abounding with many fine strokes of genius and admirable portraiture of nature. The language is generally good, and often so chaste and expressive that no writer will ever be able to surpass it. There are, it is true, to be found in it many broken and a few ill constructed and unmusical lines, but still it must be attributed to the May-day and prime blossom of his genius. Excepting also the last act, it has less incident than is usual in our author's compositions. But all this is abundantly compensated by the masterly manner in which he has drawn and discriminated his characters, by the propriety of his passion, the beauty and majesty of his sentiment, and the sweetness of his language. There was certainly a long interval

interval of industrious improvement between the writing of Antony and Cleopatra and that of Julius Cæsar.

Let me here remark, that a fine subject for the painter is to be found in the first scene of the second act of this play, when the conspirators are severally introduced to Brutus in his orchard, immediately before day-break. The artist has an opportunity of delineating much interesting passion in the countenances of Brutus and Cassius, who are engaged in private consultation; while the rest, that they may not seem to overhear, are disputing at what point the sun is to rise. The faint light of the dawn and the solemn shades of the orchard, would contribute to make the *monstrous visage* of conspiracy truly awful, and to render the whole design majestic and terrible.

TIMON OF ATHENS.*See CORIOLANUS.***TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.**

This piece, as Dr. Johnson has observed, is more correctly written than most of Shakespear's compositions. The characters are also, as he has taken notice, diversified with great variety and preserved with great exactness. I will add, that there is great elevation of sentiment and dignity of character in the greater personages of the play, the language is pure and well selected, and the lines are very rarely ill constructed. It will follow, of course, that this could not be, as Dryden erroneously supposed, one of our author's first endeavours. The conjecture of Mr. Pope will appear much more probable, that it was one of his last.

Mr.

Mr. Malone is led to imagine, because *Thersites* is mentioned in *Cymbeline*, that *Troilus and Cressida* might be written before that play. The same might be concluded of *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *All's Well that ends Well*, *As you Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry V.* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; for all these plays contain allusions to the story of *Troilus and Cressida*. But perhaps it may be doubted whether any one of them was written at a later period. *Cymbeline* was certainly a very early performance.

C Y M B E L I N E,

That *Cymbeline* should have been written in the interval between *King Lear* and those two excellent pieces *Macbeth* and *Julius Cæsar*, as Mr Malone has stated, I can by no means be brought to believe. It is a piece which abounds with lines which are rude and harsh in their metre,
and

and are improperly constructed. The language also, in many places, wants clearness, and the poet betrays every where evident marks of want of skill and practice. He varies the quantity of his proper names as in *Coriolanus*, and perhaps there are no two plays which may more properly be associated together. *Cymbeline* might be the last written. Dr. Johnson has very properly observed, that it has many faults. The fable is often absurdly conducted. And yet, with all its imperfections, it may be deemed a charming piece. The catastrophe, in particular, is truly delightful, and in many instances ingeniously managed.

KING LEAR.

If the date which Mr. Malone gives to *Julius Cæsar* be right (and I have no reason to think it otherwise), the tragedy of *King Lear* cannot be assigned to a year in which it was more likely to have been
written

written than that in which Mr. Malone has placed it. There was certainly an interval of improvement between the writing of these two plays, but not a very long one. For Lear; though not always so pure and unexceptionable in its language as Julius Cæsar, is yet often written in a manner that is neat and correct, and manifests in a thousand instances the experienced poet and faithful observer of nature. It is true, the barbarity of many of its incidents is insupportable and we cannot but wonder how Shakespear could reconcile himself to a conclusion so cruel. Yet is there no composition of this great poet's in which he has more displayed his power of varying and discriminating characters, and of appealing to the heart for its pity and its indignation. Add to this, that it abounds with maxims of good sense and experience, its metrical faults are very few, and its beauties frequent and striking.

ROMEO

ROMEO AND JULIET.

Mr. Malone has with great justice observed, that Shakespear, in his early plays, was much addicted to rhyming; a practice from which, says he, he gradually departed, though he never deserted it. And in this piece, he adds, there are found more rhymes than in any other of our author's plays, *Love's Labour Lost*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream* only excepted. From this circumstance, as well as from the story (which he thinks was likely to captivate a young poet), from the imperfect form in which it originally appeared, and from its very early publication, he is inclined to believe that it was Shakespear's first Tragedy.

Mr. Tyrwhitt conjectures that at least a part of it was written so early as 1591; and Mr. Malone subjoins, that he thinks it not improbable that Shakespear might have laid the foundation of the play in that year,

year, and have finished it at a subsequent period.

The latter opinion seems to me to be the truth. The play was evidently written at different times. The masterly manner in which it is brought to a conclusion, which Dr. Johnson very justly pronounces to be irresistibly affecting, and the great address which the Poet has shewn in reconciling us to the indiscriminate destruction of his characters, in order to enforce his moral of the fatal consequences of family dissensions—when compared with the first part of the play, must convince us that it could not have been written without interruption. But no part of it was perhaps written at a very early period, for the language is generally correct, and the versification smooth. I should place it after the Taming of the Shrew. Perhaps this is its proper situation, for there are many passages in it which bear a strong resemblance to the stile of the Comedy of Errors, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, and Love's Labour Lost.

HAMLET.

H A M L E T.

The conduct of this piece exposes it, in many instances, to just reproof from the discerning critic. I am nevertheless of opinion, from the correctness with which it is written, and the gravity of the sentiment, that it was one of Shakespear's latest efforts. I find no reason to imagine that it was written at different periods, and think it probable, from a passage in the first act, that it followed Julius Cæsar. It deserves well to be ranked with that excellent play and the Merchant of Venice.

O T H E L L O.

Othello, I think, could not have been the last production of Shakespear's muse, and therefore can have no title to the place in which it generally stands. It is indeed written with a considerable degree of cor-

D rectness;

rectness ; yet is there to be found in it but little of that weighty judgment and moral dignity which characterizes those which appear to have been his latest productions. On the contrary, the sublimer parts of it often approach to fustian, and the moral are poorly and sometimes unintelligibly expressed. There is also, in the language in many places, something artificial and affected ; a vice to which he was certainly superior in his best and latest performances. It appears, however, very probable, that this piece was produced after the accession of James. Before the *Tempest* it could not possibly have been written, according to Mr. Malone's catalogue, the latter bearing incontestable marks of being the offspring of a writer much less experienced.

TITUS ANDRONICUS.

The authenticity of this play has been so generally and justly questioned, that it

is needless to inquire where it should be placed. That it is Shakespear's I will not maintain, having many powerful doubts to the contrary. I must, however, confess, that I think the versification of it bears some resemblance to that of the Comedy of Errors and the Two Gentlemen of Verona. It is not, however, so correctly written as either of those plays, and has very evidently been embellished here and there with touches of a more masterly hand, perhaps Shakespear's. These passages are distinguished from the rest by the irregularity of their metre and the forcibleness of their expression. Johnson did not think that traces of Shakespear were to be found in it, and therefore refuses to subscribe to Theobald's creed, who deemed it incontestable. That Shakespear was the author of the passages inserted, I will not declare. They certainly are such as would not have been unworthy of his pen. Indeed there are in many parts of this play symptoms of genius, and a mind not inattentive to inanimate nature; though, taken altogether

as a composition, nothing can be conceived more barbarous and disgusting.

The reader is now in possession of the sentiments of an assiduous admirer and frequent peruser of Shakespear, respecting the present improper arrangement of his admirable dramatic productions. I will detain his attention no longer, but conclude with offering what my own judgment may perhaps fallaciously lead me to imagine is a more correct disposition of the plays of our astonishing bard. I do not offer it as faultless. A little time may produce a change in opinion, and make me dissent as freely with myself as I have presumed to do with Mr. Malone. It is, at least, probable that many readers will differ from me, and to those who cannot join with me in opinion, I have only to add, that if they have it in
their

their power to draw up a better arrangement, the world, in general, and the author of these remarks in particular, will be obliged to them for producing it.



New

New Disposition of the Plays of Shakespear,

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA,
WINTER'S TALE,
CYMBELINE,
CORIOLANUS,
TIMON OF ATHENS,
THE TEMPEST.
MEASURE FOR MEASURE.
THE TAMING OF THE SHREW,
ROMEO AND JULIET.
THE MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM,
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.
OTHELLO.
THE COMEDY OF ERRORS.
LOVE'S LABOUR LOST.
THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA,
TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.
ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.
TWELFTH NIGHT.
KING JOHN.
RICHARD II.

HENRY

HENRY IV. P. I.

HENRY IV. P. II.

HENRY V.

HENRY VI. P. I.

HENRY VI. P. II.

HENRY VI. P. III.

RICHARD III.

HENRY VIII.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

MACBETH.

KING LEAR.

JULIUS CÆSAR.

HAMLET.

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